

Time to decide on Keystone pipeline

By Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.) -

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“I’m the decider, and I decide what is best.”

It’s a shame that former President George W. Bush caught so much flak for those now-infamous words, because there is a great deal of truth in them. We want our country’s chief executive to be capable of making tough decisions. Unfortunately, we don’t have a decider in the Oval Office these days. Our current president is the complete opposite — he’s more of a procrastinator.

During his time in office, President Obama has put off decision after decision. He delayed Arctic offshore oil lease sales until 2015, he pushed back reviewing the smog standard until 2013 and he put off his verdict on the Keystone XL Pipeline until 2013. Because the president refused to step up and make a decision on Keystone XL, the House and Senate forced his hand. We approved a bill requiring the president to authorize Keystone XL by Feb. 21, 2012 — unless the president decides that Keystone XL is not in our country’s best interest.

There’s that word again. “Decide.” It’s well past time for a decision on Keystone XL. While similar pipelines are regularly approved in 18 to 24 months, Keystone XL is still sitting on the shelf at month 40. If Feb. 21 comes around and Obama has decided that the Keystone XL Pipeline is not in our country’s best interest — or if he hasn’t decided anything at all — he will have some serious explaining to do to the American people.

Job creation is certainly among our country’s best interests. With our economy struggling to recover, job creation might just be our top priority. Americans want to work, but while the president twiddles his thumbs in the White House, employment opportunities grow fewer and fewer. Yet, here sits Keystone XL, promising at least 20,000 direct on-site jobs in construction, operations and supporting industries.

That is not a number simply plucked out of the air. Each of those 20,000+ jobs has been accounted for by TransCanada, the company that proposed Keystone XL. TransCanada’s vice president recently broke down Keystone XL’s anticipated job creation as follows:

- Construction: 17 pipeline “spreads” x 500 workers/spread = 8,500 workers

- Operations: 30 pump stations x 100 workers/station = 3,000 workers

- Manufacturing (pipes, hardware, etc.): 7,000 workers

- Oversight/Management: 1,000 workers

- Assembly camps: 600 workers

These are more than 20,000 real jobs for Americans — jobs that cannot be outsourced. Yet, Americans still wait for these jobs, for these opportunities, and for the president to make a decision on Keystone XL.

But the Obama administration continues to drag its feet on Keystone XL, just as it has for three long years. During this time, the president, like other great procrastinators, has continued to rationalize his inaction. He has claimed that the State Department’s initial environmental review wasn’t good enough and that he would ask the State Department — and the same biologists, engineers and environmental analysts that completed the first review — for a second. For one reason or another, he wasn’t satisfied with the final Environmental Impact Statement released in August 2011 by the State Department. The president didn’t like the State Department’s conclusion that the preferred course of action with Keystone XL would be to proceed with the project as originally proposed.

In the wake of the State Department study, the president stalled, citing the supposed risk that the pipeline poses to Nebraska’s environment. But I’m proud to say that Nebraska state representatives didn’t want to risk having Obama take his sweet time to reroute the pipeline around Nebraska’s Sand Hills region, so they are now plotting the new route themselves.

Sometimes the most risky decision is not making a decision at all. By stalling on the Keystone

XL Pipeline, Obama is playing dice with our economy and gambling with the lives of hardworking Americans. The longer he waits, the clearer it becomes that Americans will not tolerate inaction in uncertain times.

The fact is, making a decision this close to the election — even a decision that stands to create tens of thousands of desperately needed jobs — could hurt the president politically. Do we really need another leader who is willing to put his own political life before the lives of the American people? I don't think so. What we need is a decider.

Terry is a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and is the author of H.R. 1938, the North American-Made Energy Security Act.